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Imagining and Democratizing Future Mobilities

Learning from studio designs for integrated mobile matters of concern

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Alternatives to the Present. A Conference on Architecture, Urbanism, Sociology, Development & Planning

- **Paper / Proposal Title:**

Imagining and Democratizing Future Mobilities

– learning from studio designs for integrated mobile matters of concern

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- **Abstract (300 words):**

How can we re-imagine the urban infrastructures of cities and offer alternative responses to the present situation of path-dependency with too much automobility-dominated, people-hostile and single-minded urban infrastructure? In which ways can future mobilities designs integrate responsible action on the ecological crisis with meaningful everyday mobilities for people and with local urban places.

Taking its outset in mobilities design research and utopian studies, this paper reports and reflects upon the 2017 IMAGINE Mobilities Design Studio at Aalborg University's Urban Design program. The studio involved approx. 25 master students with backgrounds in architecture, urban design and urban planning from countries in Europe. It explored large- and small-scale infrastructures - systems, networks, sites and structures - of the urban territory of the city of Aalborg, Denmark, and aimed to give designerly input to open agendas for the urban mobile future. Positioned within a lineage of critical,

speculative, inventive urban mobilities imaginaries, the studio investigated how existing infrastructural systems in Aalborg – designed for the 20th Century (and in some cases currently on the edge of maximum capacity and collapse) – might be modified and mobilized to address the probable, possible and preferable needs and desires of the 21st Century and beyond.

The paper cultivates a utopian energy in examining future responses to mobile matters of concern through the studio's explorations of critical challenges and opportunities. Following this, the paper's contribution is twofold.

First, it suggests learning points for future design of infrastructure as an integrated mobilities design discipline that is socially, ecologically, and aesthetically concerned, and critically attuned as to what to do now. For example, the studio produced an imaginary examining a city-integrated hybrid link across Aalborg's fiord as an alternative to current official visions of a new mono-functional car-based fiord connection

Second, the paper offers a methodological reflection on how design imaginaries can contribute to democratizing futures, by articulating, communicating and negotiating key matters of concern as they give and present form to problematic and unknown future situations. The studio results are not blueprints for the future. Instead, we discuss them as counter images to path-dependency that are experientially accessible, provisional and reflexive.

• **Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Ditte Bendix Lanng is assistant professor, MSc. Urban Design, Ph.D., at the Department of Architecture, Design & Media Technology, Aalborg University, Denmark. Ditte's research interests target Urban Design and Mobilities Design - a combination of fields that she researches through cross-disciplinary theory, design experiments as modes of sociocultural enquiry, and as a collective enterprise with planning and architectural practice. She has a commitment to potential societal relevance and significance of urban design, and she seeks to contribute to design's theoretical and methodological understanding of materialities as networked and active hybrids. She is the author (with Ole B. Jensen) of *Mobilities Design. Urban designs for Mobile Situations*, 2017, Routledge.

Ole B. Jensen is Professor of Urban Theory at the Department of Architecture, Design and Media Technology, Aalborg University (Denmark). He is deputy director, co-founder and board member at the *Center for Mobilities and Urban Studies (C-MUS)*, and Director of the research cluster in 'Mobility and Tracking Technology' (MoTT). His main research interests are within Urban Mobilities, Mobilities Design, and Networked Technologies. He is the co-author of *Making European Space. Mobility, Power and Territorial Identity*, Routledge, 2004 (with Tim Richardson), and author of *Staging Mobilities*, Routledge, 2013,

and *Designing Mobilities*, 2014, Aalborg University Press, the Editor of the four-volume collection *Mobilities*, Routledge, 2015, and author (with Ditte Bendix Lanng) of *Mobilities Design. Urban Designs for Mobile Situations*, 2017, Routledge.

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